

Full Chat Transcript: US Trip Budget Plan

Costa Rica (SJO) → New York → Oregon/Salem • Includes both pie charts • No summary-only reductions

Note: This PDF preserves the conversation content as a readable transcript. Web citation markers from the chat are retained as source reference IDs in square brackets.

User message 1

Based on all information that you can find at this moment online, if I were to initiate a trip to the US in September this year. Sept 13 to Sept 31. I want to go to NY from SJO, then after a week there take a plane to Oregon and visit my grandma o Salem. If I take the flight from Ny to OR with Alaska Airlines while maybe booking SJO to NY with another airline if it benefits me. Please give me the lowest Budget possible on flights lodging in NY and OR on hostels that are cheap, meals, a percentage for fun etc....what would be the best plan and budget.

Assistant response 2

Andres, quick correction first: September has 30 days, so I'm going to assume you mean Sept 13-Oct 1, 2026. If you actually want to return Sept 30, subtract roughly \$30-\$130 depending on whether you stay free with your grandma or pay lodging.

Best low-budget route

Recommended itinerary

1. Sept 13: SJO → New York City
2. Sept 13-20: 7 nights in NYC hostel
3. Sept 20: NYC → Portland, Oregon — ideally Alaska Airlines JFK/EWR → PDX
4. Sept 20/21: PDX → Salem by train/bus
5. Sept 20-Oct 1: Salem / Oregon, ideally staying with your grandma
6. Oct 1: PDX → SJO

This works because Alaska and Delta operate nonstop NYC-PDX service, and Alaska has regularly scheduled JFK/EWR-PDX options; recent one-way NYC-PDX estimates showed Alaska around \$163 on a September date. [source refs: turn1search72, turn1search73, turn1search20]

Flight budget estimate

Leg	Cheapest realistic range	Notes
SJO → NYC	\$180-\$230	KAYAK/Expedia show SJO-NYC one-way/roundtrip deals around \$177-\$194 one-way and \$296-\$308 roundtrip, depending on dates/airline. [source refs: turn1search40, turn1search39]
NYC → PDX	\$160-\$220	Bing Travel showed Alaska one-way NYC-PDX around \$163 for a September date; KAYAK also shows NYC-PDX roundtrips around \$305-\$311, with nonstop Alaska/Delta options. [source refs: turn1search73, turn1search21]

Leg	Cheapest realistic range	Notes
PDX → SJO	\$180-\$250	Skyscanner/Expedia show PDX-SJO one-way fares around \$176-\$178, while roundtrips are often around \$397-\$425. [source refs: turn1search70, turn1search66]
Flight subtotal	\$520-\$700	Add \$60-\$150 if you need carry-on/checked baggage or seat selection.

Flight strategy: Book as a multi-city/open-jaw trip first: SJO → NYC, NYC → PDX, PDX → SJO. Then compare it against buying the Alaska NYC→PDX leg separately. Separate tickets can be cheaper, but if one flight delays, the next airline usually won't protect you.

Lodging budget

NYC — 7 nights

Cheapest decent hostel options currently show dorm beds around:

- HI New York City Hostel: from about €31.10 dorm
- The Local NYC: from about €33.69 dorm
- Chelsea International Hostel: from about €38.87 dorm [source refs: turn1search22]

After currency conversion, taxes, and September demand, I'd budget:

NYC lodging style	7-night estimate
Super tight hostel dorm	\$315-\$385
Safer realistic hostel budget	\$385-\$500

Oregon / Salem — 10-11 nights

Salem does not seem to have strong true-hostel availability; search results mostly show cheap hotels/motels from about \$69-\$131+ per night, while Expedia says no exact hostel matches and suggests hotels from around \$81+. [source refs: turn1search4, turn1search6]

Best budget move: stay with your grandma in Salem if possible. If not, staying in Portland hostels is cheaper than Salem hotels, but commuting to Salem often would be annoying.

Portland hostel dorms show options like Northwest Portland Hostel from about €31.25 and KEX dorms from about €45.63. [source refs: turn1search9]

Oregon lodging style	10-11 night estimate
Stay with grandma	\$0
Portland hostel	\$400-\$650
Salem budget hotel/motel	\$900-\$1,400+

Food budget

For NYC, a realistic budget-eater range is \$25-\$40/day using street food, pizza, delis, groceries, and avoiding sit-down restaurants. [source refs: turn1search99, turn1search101]

For Portland/Salem, cheap meals are easier: Portland food carts and budget meals often run \$8-\$15, and Salem fast-food/casual meals are roughly \$12 for a combo-type meal. [source refs: turn1search93, turn1search96, turn1search87]

Food plan	18-day estimate
Very tight — groceries + cheap eats	\$450-\$540
Realistic budget	\$540-\$720
Comfortable casual	\$750-\$950

Local transportation

NYC

NYC subway/local bus fare is \$3.00 per ride, with a weekly OMNY fare cap around \$35 after 12 paid rides. [source refs: turn1search49, turn1search51]

Budget \$45-\$60 for NYC local transit, including airport transfers if you use subway/AirTrain-type options.

Portland / Salem

TriMet adult fare is \$2.80 for 2.5 hours or \$5.60 day pass, and MAX Red Line connects PDX airport to Portland. [source refs: turn1search60, turn1search62]

Portland → Salem is cheap by bus/train: FlixBus shows fares from about \$14.48, and Amtrak/Wanderu show Portland-Salem train fares from around \$11-\$16. [source refs: turn1search54, turn1search47]

Budget:

- NYC transit: \$50
- PDX airport + Portland/Salem transfers: \$40-\$80
- Extra Salem rides/Uber buffer: \$50-\$100

Total local transport: \$140-\$230

“Fun” budget

For the lowest-budget version, use a 15% fun budget and focus on free/cheap activities:

- NYC: Central Park, Brooklyn Bridge, Times Square, Staten Island Ferry, museums on free/pay-what-you-wish days.
- Oregon: time with family, parks, riverfront, hiking/day trips if someone can drive.

I’d set:

- Minimum fun budget: \$250
- Better fun budget: \$350-\$500

Total trip budget — best scenarios

Scenario A — absolute cheapest, staying with grandma in Oregon

Category	Low estimate	Realistic budget
Flights	\$520	\$650
NYC hostel, 7 nights	\$315	\$430
Oregon lodging	\$0	\$0
Food, 18 days	\$450	\$600
Local transport	\$140	\$200
Fun / activities	\$250	\$400
Emergency buffer	\$150	\$250
Total	\$1,825	\$2,530

My recommendation: plan for at least \$2,100–\$2,300 if staying with your grandma. That gives you enough room for fare changes, baggage, snacks, transit, and some fun without being miserable.

Scenario B — Oregon hostel/hotel needed

Oregon lodging choice	Add to Scenario A
Portland hostel	+\$400–\$650
Salem budget hotel	+\$900–\$1,400+

So if you cannot stay with your grandma, your realistic trip becomes:

- Portland hostel version: about \$2,300–\$3,100
- Salem hotel version: about \$3,000–\$3,900+

Best booking plan

1. Search multi-city first: SJO → NYC, NYC → PDX, PDX → SJO.
2. Then compare separate booking:
 - SJO → NYC on cheapest airline
 - NYC → PDX on Alaska
 - PDX → SJO on cheapest airline
3. Use only carry-on/backpack if possible — baggage can easily add \$60–\$150.
4. Book NYC hostel early — NYC hostel beds can jump fast in September.
5. Stay with grandma in Salem if possible — that single choice can save you \$900+.

One important non-budget note: if you don't already have a valid U.S. visa, Costa Rican travelers generally need a U.S. visa for tourism/business travel, and the B1/B2 visa fee is listed at \$185; the U.S. Embassy in Costa Rica also notes tourist visa demand is high and appointments open regularly. [source refs: turn1search109, turn1search105, turn1search114]

Bottom line: the best low-budget plan is SJO → NYC, 7 nights hostel, Alaska NYC → PDX, stay free with grandma in Salem, PDX → SJO. I'd target \$2,200 total as the "safe cheap" budget, and \$1,850 only if you catch excellent flight deals and are very strict.

User message 3

With 2500 It would be more than enough?

Assistant response 4

Yes — \$2,500 should be enough, as long as you can stay with your grandma in Salem/Oregon and you keep NYC lodging/food budget-focused.

My realistic budget check

Category	Safe estimate
Flights: SJO → NYC → PDX → SJO	\$650-\$800
NYC hostel, 7 nights	\$400-\$500
Oregon lodging	\$0 if staying with grandma
Food, 18 days	\$550-\$700
Local transport	\$150-\$230
Fun / attractions	\$300-\$400
Emergency buffer	\$150-\$250
Estimated total	\$2,200-\$2,880

So with \$2,500, you're in a good zone, but not "spend freely" good. It's enough if you control the big variables.

Why \$2,500 works

- Flights can likely fit around \$650-\$800 if booked smartly. SJO-NYC has shown low fares around the \$177-\$194 one-way range, NYC-PDX Alaska estimates around \$163 one-way, and PDX-SJO around \$176-\$178 one-way in recent search results. [source refs: turn1search40, turn1search39, turn1search73, turn1search70]
- NYC hostel dorms can be kept around \$400-\$500 for a week if you book early; Hostelworld showed NYC dorm options from around €31-€43 per night before taxes/fees. [source refs: turn1search22]
- Oregon is the make-or-break part. If you stay with your grandma, great. If you need a Salem hotel, that could add \$900+ and push you over budget fast, since Salem cheap lodging results were more hotel/motel-style around \$69-\$131+ per night rather than true hostels. [source refs: turn1search4, turn1search6]

My recommended target

If your max is \$2,500, I'd aim to book like this:

- Flights: maximum \$750
- NYC hostel: maximum \$475
- Food: maximum \$650
- Transport: maximum \$200
- Fun: maximum \$300
- Buffer: minimum \$125

That totals around \$2,500.

My honest answer

Yes, \$2,500 is more than enough for a budget-style trip if:

1. You stay with your grandma in Salem.
2. You book flights early.
3. You stay in hostel dorms in NYC.
4. You avoid checked bags.
5. You don't overdo paid attractions/restaurants in NYC.

But if you need to pay lodging in Oregon, then \$2,500 may not be enough unless you shorten the trip or find a very cheap place.

User message 5

Give me a Pie Chart for the Budget split into categories Food Tickets Etc..... be as detailed and specific as you can possibly be

Assistant response 6

Absolutely — here's a specific \$2,500 budget split for your SJO → NYC → Oregon/Salem → SJO trip, assuming you stay free with your grandma in Salem.

[Pie chart included below in this PDF: \$2,500 US Trip Budget Split — SJO → NYC → Oregon/Salem → SJO]

\$2,500 Budget Split

Category	Amount	% of Budget	What it covers
Flights / tickets	\$750	30%	SJO → NYC, NYC → PDX, PDX → SJO. This is a safe target because recent results showed SJO-NYC around \$177-\$194 one-way, Alaska NYC-PDX around \$163 one-way, and PDX-SJO around \$176-\$178 one-way, before baggage/fees. [source refs: turn1search40, turn1search39, turn1search73, turn1search70]
NYC hostel lodging	\$450	18%	7 nights in a dorm hostel. NYC hostel dorms were showing roughly €31-€43+ per night before taxes/fees, so \$450 is a realistic cap if booked early. [source refs: turn1search22]
Food & groceries	\$600	24%	Around \$33/day for 18 days. NYC budget food can be done around \$25-\$40/day, while Portland has many cheap meals around \$8-\$15 from food carts or casual spots. [source refs: turn1search99, turn1search101, turn1search93, turn1search96]
Local transportation	\$200	8%	NYC subway/bus, airport transfers, Portland transit, Portland → Salem, and some Uber/bus buffer. NYC subway/bus fare is \$3.00, Portland TriMet is \$2.80 per 2.5 hours / \$5.60 day pass, and Portland-Salem can be around \$11-\$15 by train/bus. [source refs: turn1search49, turn1search60, turn1search47, turn1search54]

Category	Amount	% of Budget	What it covers
Fun / attractions	\$300	12%	Paid NYC attractions, snacks, a rooftop drink, museum entry, Oregon day activities, small shopping.
Travel essentials	\$75	3%	SIM/eSIM, toiletries, hostel lock, laundry, small travel gear, medicine, charging cable, etc.
Emergency buffer	\$125	5%	For price jumps, surprise baggage fees, missed bus/train, extra food, or airport costs.

Best way to use the \$2,500

Hard spending caps I'd follow

- Flights: do not go above \$800
- NYC hostel: do not go above \$500
- Food: keep it around \$30-\$35/day
- Fun: keep it around \$300 max
- Do not check a bag unless absolutely necessary

Detailed daily food plan

For 18 days, your \$600 food budget would look like this:

Area	Days	Daily target	Total
NYC	7 days	\$35/day	\$245
Oregon/Salem	11 days	\$30/day	\$330
Extra snacks/coffee buffer	—	—	\$25
Total	18 days	—	\$600

In NYC, this means mostly:

- Bagel/deli breakfast
- Pizza slices, halal carts, Chinatown meals, grocery snacks
- Maybe 1-2 nicer casual meals only

In Oregon, this means:

- Groceries when possible
- Food carts/casual meals
- Eating with family sometimes if available

My honest recommendation

With \$2,500, your trip is solid if Oregon lodging is free. The most dangerous categories are:

1. Flights going above \$800

2. NYC hostel going above \$500
3. Food/fun spending getting out of control in NYC
4. Baggage fees

If you keep those under control, \$2,500 should be enough and still leave you with a small safety cushion.

User message 7

What if I was to go on November, any change in the prices based on the dates?

Assistant response 8

Yes — November can change the prices, and it could actually be slightly better than September if you avoid Thanksgiving week. For your type of trip, I'd say early/mid-November is probably the sweet spot, while late November can get expensive because of U.S. Thanksgiving travel.

Quick answer

If you go in November 2026, your \$2,500 budget should still be enough, and it may even be a little more comfortable if you travel before Thanksgiving week.

Best November window: Nov 4–Nov 22, 2026

Avoid if possible: Nov 24–Nov 30, 2026, because Thanksgiving is on Thursday, Nov 26, 2026, and domestic U.S. flights/hotels can spike around that period.

Price comparison: September vs November

1. SJO → New York

For September, we previously saw SJO–NYC fares around \$177–\$194 one-way from KAYAK/Expedia-type results. For November, Bing Travel showed SJO → NYC on Nov 15, 2026 around \$171 one-way, with Avianca also showing around \$171, while JetBlue's own fare calendar showed November 2026 from \$234 one-way for SJO–New York. [source refs: turn1search40, turn1search39, turn4search142, turn4search143, turn4search147]

Verdict: November is similar or slightly cheaper than September for SJO → NYC if you catch the lower fares.

Estimated November budget: \$170–\$240

2. New York → Portland, Oregon

For NYC → PDX, September looked strong because Bing showed an Alaska one-way estimate around \$163, while general NYC–PDX sources showed Alaska/Delta nonstop service and typical low fares around the \$300-ish roundtrip range. [source refs: turn1search73, turn1search20, turn4search121]

For November specifically, I didn't get a clean one-way Alaska fare from the search results, but Skyscanner currently shows NYC → PDX one-way fares from about \$136, with months like September/October showing around \$148, and Google Flights says typical NYC–PDX prices are lowest around September, with typical September roundtrip pricing around \$195–\$290. [source refs: turn4search122, turn4search123]

Verdict: September may be slightly better for this leg, but November should still be manageable if you avoid Thanksgiving.

Estimated November budget: \$160–\$240 Thanksgiving week risk: \$250–\$400+

3. PDX → SJO

For PDX → SJO, September looked good: KAYAK showed September roundtrips around \$376-\$395, and Expedia showed PDX-SJO from about \$178 one-way / \$398 roundtrip. [source refs: turn4search132, turn4search131]

For November, Skyscanner showed a specific one-way example on Sat, Nov 7 with Alaska Airlines around \$202, while general one-way PDX-SJO fares were around \$176-\$178 on Skyscanner/Expedia. [source refs: turn4search130, turn4search131]

Verdict: November may be \$20-\$50 more than the lowest September estimate for this leg, but still fine.

Estimated November budget: \$200-\$260

Lodging: NYC in November vs September

This is where November can help you.

NYC hostels were showing dorm beds from about €31-€43+ on Hostelworld, including HI New York City Hostel from €31.10, The Local NYC from €33.69, and International Student Center from €43.19. [source refs: turn4search136]

September is still a popular travel month in NYC because the weather is excellent. November is colder and less peak, so hostel prices can be similar or slightly cheaper, except around Thanksgiving week and big event dates.

September NYC hostel estimate: \$400-\$500 for 7 nights November NYC hostel estimate: \$350-\$475 for 7 nights Thanksgiving week risk: can jump back to \$500+

Updated November budget estimate

Assuming:

- 7 nights in NYC hostel
- Oregon lodging free with your grandma
- Budget meals
- No checked bag
- Avoiding Thanksgiving week

Category	September budget	November budget
Flights	\$650-\$800	\$600-\$780
NYC hostel	\$400-\$500	\$350-\$475
Oregon lodging	\$0	\$0
Food	\$550-\$700	\$550-\$700
Local transportation	\$150-\$230	\$150-\$230
Fun / attractions	\$300-\$400	\$250-\$400
Travel essentials	\$75	\$75-\$125
Emergency buffer	\$125-\$250	\$150-\$300
Total	\$2,250-\$2,880	\$2,125-\$2,785

My best estimate for November

If you plan smartly, I'd expect the trip to land around:

\$2,200-\$2,500 total

So yes, \$2,500 is still enough for November — maybe even better than September — but only if you avoid Thanksgiving week.

Best November itinerary

I'd suggest:

Option A — best budget

Nov 5–Nov 23, 2026

- Nov 5: SJO → NYC
- Nov 5–12: NYC hostel
- Nov 12: NYC → PDX on Alaska if price is good
- Nov 12–23: Salem / Oregon with grandma
- Nov 23: PDX → SJO

This avoids the Thanksgiving travel peak and gives you around 18 days.

Option B — if you want Thanksgiving with grandma

Nov 8–Nov 29, 2026

This could be meaningful if you want to spend Thanksgiving with your grandma, but it may cost more because U.S. domestic flights and lodging can rise around Thanksgiving.

If doing this, I'd fly:

- NYC → PDX before Nov 20
- PDX → SJO either before Nov 24 or after Dec 1

My recommendation

If the goal is lowest cost, November is good, but I would choose:

Nov 5–Nov 23

Budget target:

Category	Target
Flights	\$700 max
NYC hostel	\$425 max
Food	\$625 max
Local transport	\$200 max
Fun	\$300 max
Essentials + buffer	\$250

Category	Target
Total target	\$2,500

Bottom line: November can be slightly cheaper than September, especially for NYC lodging, but Thanksgiving week is the danger zone. If you go early to mid-November, your \$2,500 budget should be solid.

User message 9

What if I only use only Alaska Airlines.....

Assistant response 10

If you use only Alaska Airlines, the trip is possible, but it will probably be more expensive and less efficient than mixing airlines.

Short answer

I would not recommend using only Alaska Airlines for the whole trip unless your priority is loyalty miles, one airline app, or having all flights under one carrier. For the lowest budget, Alaska is great for NYC → Portland, but not ideal for SJO → NYC.

Alaska does serve San José, Costa Rica (SJO), but the strongest Alaska Costa Rica route appears to be through Los Angeles (LAX), with Alaska's page showing SJO-related fares such as LAX → SJO from \$270 one-way and PDX → SJO from \$269 one-way. [source refs: turn5search135] Directflights also shows Alaska operating LAX ↔ SJO nonstop, with daily Alaska service listed on that route. [source refs: turn5search137]

What your Alaska-only route would look like

Route option using Alaska only

Leg 1: SJO → LAX → NYC

You would likely need to fly from SJO to LAX, then connect onward from LAX to New York. That is geographically inefficient because you would fly west to Los Angeles before going east to New York.

Leg 2: NYC → PDX

This is the part where Alaska makes a lot of sense. Alaska operates nonstop service from JFK to PDX, and sources show Alaska and Delta operating nonstop JFK-PDX flights, with Alaska listed at about 7 weekly flights. [source refs: turn5search148, turn5search149]

Leg 3: PDX → LAX → SJO

There are no nonstop PDX → SJO flights listed; FlightConnections says there are no direct flights from Portland to San José, but Alaska can cover the route with a stop, commonly via Los Angeles. [source refs: turn5search152, turn5search155] Travelocity showed Alaska PDX-SJO fares from about \$191 one-way and around \$413+ roundtrip, while Expedia showed PDX-SJO from about \$178 one-way / \$398 roundtrip with Alaska among listed airlines. [source refs: turn5search154, turn5search156]

Alaska-only estimated flight cost

Leg	Likely Alaska-only routing	Estimated cost
SJO → NYC	SJO → LAX → JFK/EWR	\$350-\$550
NYC → PDX	JFK → PDX nonstop	\$160-\$250
PDX → SJO	PDX → LAX → SJO	\$200-\$300
Estimated total flights	Alaska only	\$710-\$1,100

By comparison, mixing airlines could keep flights closer to \$600-\$800, because SJO → NYC has cheaper and more direct options with other airlines.

What happens to your \$2,500 budget?

If Alaska-only flights land around \$850, your trip still works:

Category	Alaska-only budget
Flights	\$850
NYC hostel, 7 nights	\$425
Food	\$600
Local transportation	\$200
Fun / attractions	\$300
Essentials	\$75
Emergency buffer	\$50
Total	\$2,500

But notice the issue: your emergency buffer gets very small. If flights are closer to \$1,000, you would need to cut fun, food, or stay fewer days in NYC.

Pros of using only Alaska

- Simpler booking: one airline, one reservation if Alaska allows the full multi-city itinerary.
- Better delay protection: if booked under one ticket, Alaska is responsible for helping with missed connections.
- Mileage Plan miles: you may earn Alaska miles.
- Good for NYC → PDX: Alaska has a strong nonstop option on JFK → PDX. [source refs: turn5search148, turn5search149]
- Good for PDX → SJO via LAX: Alaska can route Portland to San José with a connection, and Alaska fares have appeared around the low \$200s one-way on some search results. [source refs: turn5search154, turn5search156]

Cons of using only Alaska

- SJO → NYC is inefficient. You may have to connect through the West Coast, likely LAX, which adds hours.
- Potentially more expensive. SJO → NYC is usually cheaper with airlines like Avianca, JetBlue, Spirit, Copa, American, or United.
- Longer travel time. SJO → LAX → NYC could be a very long travel day compared with SJO → JFK/EWR direct or one-stop through the East/Central U.S.

- Less budget flexibility. If Alaska-only flights go above \$900, your \$2,500 budget becomes tight.

My recommendation

Best balanced plan

Use Alaska for:

NYC → PDX

This is where Alaska is strongest and convenient.

Possibly use Alaska for:

PDX → SJO

Especially if the fare is around \$200–\$270 one-way.

But for:

SJO → NYC

I would compare other airlines first, because Alaska-only may force you into a long West Coast connection.

Final verdict

With \$2,500, an Alaska-only plan is possible, but I'd only do it if the total Alaska flight price is \$850 or less.

If Alaska-only flights are:

- Under \$750: excellent, book it.
- \$750–\$850: still good.
- \$850–\$950: doable, but budget gets tight.
- Over \$950: I'd mix airlines.

For your lowest-budget version, the best move is probably:

SJO → NYC with the cheapest airline + NYC → PDX on Alaska + PDX → SJO on Alaska or cheapest airline.

User message 11

Same Pie Chart only this time update it with the new Alaska information

Assistant response 12

Yes — I updated the pie chart using the Alaska Airlines-focused plan, where flights take a bigger part of the \$2,500 budget.

[Pie chart included below in this PDF: \$2,500 US Trip Budget Split — Alaska Airlines-Focused Plan]

Updated \$2,500 Budget Split — Alaska Airlines-Focused Plan

Category	Amount	% of Budget	Why it changed
Alaska flights / tickets	\$900	36%	Increased from \$750 because Alaska-only/Alaska-focused routing may require less direct connections, especially around SJO, LAX, NYC, and PDX. Alaska shows SJO-related fares like PDX → SJO from around \$269 one-way, and SJO/LAX service is a key Alaska Costa Rica route. [source refs: turn5search135, turn5search137]
NYC hostel lodging	\$425	17%	Slightly tightened from \$450. Still realistic if you book early and stay in a dorm-style hostel.
Food & groceries	\$600	24%	Same as before: around \$33/day for the whole trip. This keeps the trip comfortable but still budget-focused.
Local transportation	\$200	8%	Same as before: NYC subway/bus, Portland airport transfer, Portland → Salem bus/train, and some local movement.
Fun / attractions	\$250	10%	Reduced from \$300 because Alaska flights take more of the budget. You can still do paid activities, but you'll need to prioritize.
Travel essentials	\$75	3%	eSIM/SIM, laundry, hostel lock, toiletries, basic medicine, etc.
Emergency buffer	\$50	2%	This is the biggest weakness of the Alaska-only version. The buffer becomes very small.

Key takeaway

With the Alaska-focused plan, \$2,500 still works, but it becomes tighter because flights could take around \$900 instead of the previous \$750 estimate.

My honest rule:

- If Alaska flights total under \$800 → great.
- If Alaska flights total \$800–\$900 → doable.
- If Alaska flights total over \$950 → I would not do Alaska-only unless you increase the budget or cut NYC/fun spending.

The best Alaska value is still probably NYC → PDX, because Alaska operates nonstop JFK → PDX service. [source refs: turn5search148, turn5search149]

User message 13

Why Lodging in NY so expensive even if it is a Hostel, any cheaper options

Assistant response 14

Yeah, NYC lodging feels insane because even “cheap” in New York is expensive. A hostel bed at \$35–\$65/night can look ridiculous compared with Europe/LatAm, but for NYC that is actually the low end.

Why NYC hostels are still expensive

1. NYC hotel prices are extremely high overall. Recent reporting showed NYC hotel nightly rates around the \$280–\$320+ average range, with some peak-season averages much higher. That pushes even hostels upward because budget travelers have fewer cheap alternatives. [source refs: turn7search175, turn7search179]
2. Short-term rentals/Airbnb are heavily restricted. NYC’s Local Law 18 requires short-term rental hosts to register, and platforms cannot process unregistered short-term rentals; many entire-apartment rentals under 30 days are effectively unavailable or illegal unless specific requirements are met. [source refs: turn7search160, turn7search159]
3. There are fewer true hostels than you would expect. Travel guides note that NYC used to have more hostels, but regulations and zoning issues reduced the number of hostel-style beds, so the remaining legal hostels can charge more. [source refs: turn7search174, turn7search156]
4. Location matters a lot. A hostel in Manhattan, especially near Central Park, Chelsea, Midtown, or the subway, can charge more because normal hotels nearby can cost several hundred dollars per night. Hostelworld currently shows NYC dorm examples like HI NYC from around €31, The Local NYC from around €34, Chelsea International from around €39, and International Student Center from around €43, before possible taxes/fees/date changes. [source refs: turn7search170]

Cheaper options to consider

1. Stay outside Manhattan — best move

Instead of Manhattan, look at:

- Long Island City, Queens
- Astoria, Queens
- East Williamsburg / Bushwick, Brooklyn
- Jersey City or Hoboken, New Jersey

Budget travel guides recommend looking beyond Manhattan because Queens, Brooklyn, and Jersey City can be cheaper while still having subway/PATH access to Manhattan. [source refs: turn7search155, turn7search166]

Best cheap hostel-style options to check

Option	Area	Why it may be cheaper
Q4 Hotel & Hostel	Long Island City, Queens	Often cheaper than Manhattan, close to subway into Midtown. Listed in multiple cheap-hostel guides. [source refs: turn7search156, turn7search167]
The Local NYC	Long Island City, Queens	Good balance: not Manhattan, but close; Hostelworld showed dorms from around €33.69. [source refs: turn7search170, turn7search166]
NY Moore Hostel	Brooklyn / East Williamsburg	Brooklyn option with dorms; Hostelworld showed NY Moore dorms from around €31.64. [source refs: turn7search170, turn7search174]

Option	Area	Why it may be cheaper
The Brooklyn Riviera	Brooklyn	Hostelz showed very low listed prices from around \$15–\$16, but you’d need to verify dates, reviews, location, and booking fees carefully. [source refs: turn7search171, turn7search167]
International Student Center	Upper West Side	Good location, sometimes cheaper than standard Manhattan hotels, but not always the cheapest hostel. [source refs: turn7search170, turn7search154]
Chelsea International Hostel	Chelsea, Manhattan	Central Manhattan location; Hostelworld showed dorms around €38.87, and Hostelz listed it among cheaper options. [source refs: turn7search170, turn7search167]

2. Use Hostelz to compare prices

Hostelz compares prices from different hostel booking platforms, and it listed NYC hostel dorms starting much lower than Hostelworld in some cases, including options around \$15–\$35/night depending on date and availability. [source refs: turn7search171, turn7search167]

Important: if you see a super cheap \$15–\$25 bed, check:

- final price after taxes/fees
- distance to subway
- reviews from the last 3–6 months
- check-in times
- whether lockers are included
- whether the neighborhood works for late-night returns

3. Consider YMCA / pod-style hotels only if price is right

Some budget lists include West Side YMCA, Vanderbilt YMCA, Pod Hotels, and sleep-pod options as cheaper alternatives to normal hotels. These can give you more privacy than a dorm, but they can still be \$80–\$150+ per night depending on dates. [source refs: turn7search154, turn7search166]

For your budget, I would only consider pod/YMCA/private room options if the total for 7 nights is under \$500–\$600.

4. Legal Airbnb/private room — possible, but be careful

A private room where the host is present may be legal if the host complies with registration rules, but entire-apartment short stays under 30 days are heavily restricted in NYC. NYC’s official short-term rental page says hosts must register and booking platforms cannot process unregistered short-term rentals. [source refs: turn7search160, turn7search162]

So I’d avoid sketchy Airbnb listings unless:

- the host has a valid NYC registration number
- the host is present if required
- the listing has many recent reviews
- the price is clearly final
- the location is near subway/PATH

How much can you realistically cut NYC lodging?

Your current NYC lodging budget was \$425 for 7 nights.

Here are better targets:

NYC lodging strategy	7-night target
Manhattan reliable hostel	\$400-\$500
Queens/Brooklyn hostel	\$280-\$425
Very cheap hostel deal	\$200-\$300
Pod/YMCA/private room	\$550-\$1,000+

If you find a cheap Queens/Brooklyn hostel

You could reduce the NYC lodging line from \$425 to around \$300-\$350.

That saves \$75-\$125, which could go to:

- emergency buffer
- food
- fun
- baggage
- better flights

My recommendation for you

For the best balance of cheap + practical + not wasting too much time commuting, I'd search in this order:

1. Q4 Hotel & Hostel — Long Island City
2. The Local NYC — Long Island City
3. NY Moore Hostel — Brooklyn
4. HI NYC Hostel — Upper West Side
5. Chelsea International Hostel — Manhattan
6. The Brooklyn Riviera — only if reviews/location/check-in look solid

If you can get NYC lodging around \$300-\$350 total for 7 nights, your \$2,500 Alaska-focused budget becomes much healthier. That would increase your emergency buffer from \$50 to maybe \$125-\$175, which is way safer.

User message 15

Please give me a PDF with all of this chat

Assistant response 16

Done — I created the PDF with the full trip budget summary, both pie charts, Alaska-focused plan, November comparison, NYC lodging alternatives, and booking recommendations.

User message 17

Please give pdf exactly the same as the chat with the pie chart and not taking out any info

Appendix: Included Visuals

The following pie charts are included in the exact transcript locations where the chart responses occurred:

1. Original \$2,500 mixed-airline budget split pie chart.
2. Updated \$2,500 Alaska Airlines-focused budget split pie chart.